

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

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TAGS: CASC (ANTLES AND HAMMATT)

SUBJECT: ANTLES/HAMMATT CASE

1. STORY BY OTTAWAY REGARDING SUBJECT CASE APPEARED IN WASHINGTON POST MAY 11. AFTER GIVING BRIEF FACTUAL ACCOUNT OF MEN'S DISAPPEARANCE AND EFFORTS TO LOCATE THEM, ARTICLE REPORTED THAT HAMMATT'S PARENTS HAD WRITTEN LETTER TO WASHINGTON POST STATING: "WE FEEL THAT THE PEOPLE OF OUR EMBASSY HAVE BEEN VERY INEFFICIENT AND LACKING IN CONCERN IN INITIATING A THOROUGH SEARCH FOR BILL AND PETE." ARTICLE STATES FURTHER THAT HAMMATTS ARE ALSO BITTER BECAUSE "THE STATE DEPARTMENT DID NOT NOTIFY THEM OF THEIR SON'S DISAPPEARANCE UNTIL FEB. 21, NEARLY SIX WEEKS AFTER HE AND ANTLES FAILED TO SHOW UP AT THEIR FIRST RENDEZVOUS."

2. -PRESENTING EMBASSY'S SIDE OF CASE OTTAWAY REPORTS AS FOLLOWS: "AMERICAN EMBASSY OFFICIALS HAVE PRIVATELY EXPRESSED THEIR IRRITATION BECAUSE HAMMATT AND ANTLES WENT AGAINST THE ADVICE OF PRACTICALLY EVERYONE THEY CONSULTED HERE.

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"THEY DIED A KIND OF USELESS DEATH BUT THEY DID IT OF

THEIR OWN FREE WILL," SAID SMITH.(TOM)

"IN DEFENSE OF THE EMBASSY'S POSITION, THE CHIEF AMERICAN CONSULAR OFFICER, JUDY A. SCHMIDT, SAID THE EMBASSY HAD NEITHER THE PERSONNEL NOR THE HELICOPTERS TO SEARCH SUCH ROUGH AND ISOLATED TERRAIN.

"SHE SAID SHE WAITED UNTIL FEB. 20 BEFORE CABLING THE STATE DEPARTMENT TO NOTIFY THE FAMILIES BECAUSE THE TWO EXPLORERS HAD NOT EXPECTED TO BE BACK IN ADDIS ABABA UNTIL FEB. 5 AND IT WAS SIMPLY NOT CLEAR WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO THEM. "WE KNEW THEY WERE MISSING, BUT IT WAS STILL TOO EARLY TO BE SURE SOMETHING VIOLENT HAD HAPPENED TO THEM," SHE SAID.

"HOWEVER, SHE ALSO SAID SHE HAD BEEN SIDETRACKED FROM THEIR CASE BY THE EVACUATION OF SEVERAL HUNDRED AMERICANS FROM ASMARA IN NORTHERN ERITREA, WHERE HEAVY FIGHTING BROKE OUT BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND SECESSIONIST GUERRILLA FORCES IN LATE JANUARY.

"I JUST DIDN'T GET TO IT," SHE SAID.

"IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT THE PRECISE FATE OF HAMMATT AND ANTLES WILL EVER BE KNOWN, FOR THE EMBASSY AND ETHIOPIAN OFFICIALS AGREE THAT IT IS TOO DANGEROUS, BECAUSE OF THE TERRAIN AND BANDITS, TO SEND A SEARCH TEAM ON FOOT INTO THE STILL-UNCONQUERED GORGE."

3. PRESS GUIDANCE WAS PREPARED FOR MAY 12 NOON BRIEFING BUT QUESTION DID NOT ARISE. COPY OF PRESS GUIDANCE BEING POUCHED.

4. ON MAY 15, DR. LELAND COLE, COUSIN OF HAMMATT, VISITED DEPARTMENT TO REPORT ON HIS EFFORTS TO LOCATE MISSING ADVENTURERS IN ETHIOPIA. COLE SAID THAT INVESTIGATORS DISPATCHED BY ATTORNEY ROBERT SCOTT VISITED EVERY VILLAGE WITHIN RADIUS OF 15 MILES OF SPOT WHERE GERMAN PARTY MEMBER WAS KILLED TO SEARCH FOR CLUES TO FATE OF HAMMATT AND ANTLES. ALTHOUGH NO CONCRETE EVIDENCE WAS FOUND, INVESTI-
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GATORS HEARD FROM SEVERAL SOURCES UNLIKELY TALE THAT MISSING MEN HAD ABANDONED THEIR EXPEDITION AFTER THE DEATH OF "A WHITE MAN ALONG THE RIVER" (UNCLEAR WHETHER THIS REFERS TO GERMAN OR TO LEW GREENWALD) AND . PLANNED TO HIKE OUT TO TENDAHO TO WORK. COLE AGREES THIS STORY INCREDIBLE, BUT SINCE IT IS ONLY REMAINING THREAD OF HOPE, HE HAS ASKED SCOTT TO FOLLOW IT UP AND HAS HIMSELF WRITTEN DIRECTLY TO TENDAHO.

5. COLE HIMSELF HAD NO CRITICISMS OF OFFICERS OF EITHER

EMBASSY OR DEPARTMENT. HE FEELS THAT LAPSE IN INFORMING PARENTS OF MEN'S DISAPPEARANCE WAS UNFORTUNATE, BUT UNDERSTANDABLE UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. HE HAS ADVISED MR. AND MRS. HAMMATT TO "COOL IT" IN THIS REGARD. NBC AND ASSOCIATEDPRESS IN LOS ANGELES HAVE REQUESTED INTERVIEW WITH COLE, AT WHICH TIME HE WILL PLAY DOWN CRITICISM.

6. DEPARTMENT WILL REPORT ANY FURTHER PUBLICITY REGARDING THIS CASE, AND WOULD APPRECIATE EMBASSY'S CONTINUING TO KEEP US INFORMED OF ANY NEW DEVELOPMENTS, PARTICULARLY FOLLOW-UP ON TENDAHO LEAD. KISSINGER

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